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“ Our death was necessary, our rising up will be necessary, in order that the word of the Son of God, the eternal word of life, may diffuse itself through the social circles of the world. It is through our nationality, tortured to death upon the cross of history, that it will be revealed to the human spirit, that the political sphere must be transformed into a religious sphere, and that the temple of God on earth must be, not this or that place, this or that form of worship, but the whole planet. For ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof.’ ”

The Nieboska Komedyia is the work by which this author was first made known to the public ; and as it is also the one which we think gives the best idea of the peculiar style and genius of his writings, we shall select this poem for more particular consideration. As we are not aware that any translation of the works of this author has yet appeared, and as the originals themselves are not easily to be procured in this country, it is our purpose, in a future number, to offer our readers a full analysis of the Nieboska Komedyia, with extracts so copious, as shall, better than any commentary, enable them to judge of the character and turn of thought of the writer.

ART. V. — *An Autobiographical Memoir of SIR JOHN BARROW, BART., late of the Admiralty ; including Reflections, Observations, and Reminiscences at Home and Abroad, from Early Life to Advanced Age.* London : John Murray. 1847. 8vo. pp. 515.

THE multiplication of biographies is one of the striking characteristics of the literature of the day. A man’s life is now very far from being finished at his death. If, in the estimation of the public, he was deemed to be a great man, or if in the judgment of his friends he ought to be so esteemed, though the public differ from them, divers ponderous octavos are very sure to be brought out to vindicate or reprove the opinion of his contemporaries. The writers of these books do not seem to remember, that, in estimating men, a *valet-de-chambre* and a grandson look from very different points of view. And so it happens, that the time seems to be near at hand when

no humbleness of occupation, no apparent insignificance of life, and no Smithiness of name, will save the community from that call to read which cannot be safely listened to or neglected.

The increased and increasing size of such books is an alarming feature in the case. The number of volumes given to the record of a man's life is apparently regarded as truly indicating his real position in the world. And this necessity of multiplying volumes brings with it the necessity of filling them. In the olden time, when a respectable octavo would contain all of the greatest man which it concerned the world to know, and an humble duodecimo "for the use of schools" was the second and last "reward of merit" bestowed in the distribution of posthumous honors, the biographer had, at least, a simple duty to perform. He had a story to tell, and he told it. But in these modern days, the circumstances of the hero's life are quite secondary affairs. All that belonged to him peculiarly is merely subsidiary to the main object. The biography has come to be an encyclopædia. If the subject of it happened to be born on a farm, we are let into much learning upon rotation of crops, sub-soils, and all the other marvellous mysteries of the art and science agricultural. A single battle in which he may have been engaged is fatal to all readers who are not learned in strategy, and not prepared by previous study to enjoy criticisms on Cæsar and Napoleon. Biographies of politicians, especially, are favorite pegs on which to hang dissertations on geography, diplomacy, statistics, and all that pertains to the origin and operations of government, the rights of man, or the course of nature.

Sometimes we are warned by the ominous title which announces the "Life and Times" of an individual, and the knowing ones prepare themselves accordingly. Of course, the history of the "Times" may not only include an account of all that was seen, done, or suffered by the men and women and Miss Martineaus of the day, but may legitimately be preceded by indefinitely protracted narratives of prior events, which give significance to, or explanation of, the thoughts, words, and deeds of the thousand heroes with whom our business more particularly lies, and be followed by a summary of subsequent events which shall gratify the excited curiosity of the reader. The "Life and Times of Old Parr" would furnish a complete history of the world from

the creation to the present day. The Flood would be a mere circumstance in the great chain of events which went to the formation of his character, or had some influence, in some way, upon some person or some thing referred to in the terrible book.

Autobiographies are especially dangerous matters. They are generally written in advanced life, when senility conspires with egotism to magnify trifles, — when a man is quite apt to differ with the public in his estimate of himself, as he is and was, — when small events become dignified, and great events are belittled, as they may have borne upon his fortunes, — when the faculty of nice discrimination is, in a good degree, lost, — and when the temptation to discursiveness, garrulity, and all manner of gossipry has become irresistible.

No period of English history is more interesting or important than the forty years between the commencement of the American war and the battle of Waterloo. There have been times when there was much more of court intrigue, and of personal and unworthy jealousies and rivalries, among her distinguished men, — times, too, when the elements of domestic strife and revolution were more rife, and when the stability of the *form* of government was more seriously endangered ; but none when the struggle was so severe to maintain power, or so decisive in establishing England's true *status* among the nations. The combination of Europe against her, during the latter years of our Revolution, rendered it doubtful whether she would not sink to the station of a second-rate power ; and the wars growing out of the French Revolution appear now, as they seemed then, to be struggles for national existence.

Such are the times which produce great men, and England had her full share of them. The second crop of such seasons is an abundance of biographies, and England has formed no exception to that rule. In stirring times, when startling events follow each other in rapid succession, every man feels his individual importance increased, without being aware that he is rising with the tide and not above it ; and very lamentable mistakes are, consequently, made in regard to the relative standing of men. The cock that enacts the crowing looks upon himself as contributing as largely to the great movement of the tragedy as the man who does Hamlet.

George III. is the prominent figure in all the accounts

of those days, not merely as the king, but as a monarch who, in an unusual degree, stamped his peculiarities upon the last thirty years of his *sane* life. His great peculiarity was his obstinacy, and most amusing it is to see how this trait in his character gave a tone to almost all the sayings and doings of the great men of the day, — how it was yielded to by the good-nature of North, how it was bullied by Fox, how it was scorned and circumvented by Pitt, how it was fed by the simplicity of Addington, and pampered by the congenial stubbornness of Eldon. The king's biography is one great ingredient in all the personal histories of the time.

We are inclined to think that the younger Pitt has suffered more than any of his contemporaries by the universal outpouring of private anecdotes and personal experiences to which we have alluded. The stately pen of history, dealing merely with his vast intellectual power and the events of his protracted administrations, — so protracted, that, when he resigned in 1801, leaving a great part of his friends in office, Sheridan said he had sat so long, that, when he rose, he left, like Hercules, the sitting part of the man behind him, — this pen of history would have sent him down to posterity as entitled to universal admiration. But when the search is carried farther, it seems to us that that calmness which gave him power in public was a coldness which was most forbidding in private life ; that he was not only imperious as a politician, and contemptuous as a subject, but haughty and exacting as a friend ; that he was self-seeking, somewhat unscrupulous in his selection of means, with all his father's proud self-reliance, without Chatham's occasional bursts of generous feeling ; that he was a noble temple of ice, solid, brilliant, but never thawing into self-forgetfulness, and never warming the hosts of worshippers, which, in common with all noble temples, he gathered around him.

It is curious to trace, by the aid of several recent books of memoirs and biographies, his course on the occasion before referred to, in 1801. He found himself at war with France, and the nation wishing, and almost clamoring, for peace. He found himself unable to conclude a peace upon terms which would be consistent with his own honor, or, as he thought, compatible with the interest of England. He knew that peace upon any other terms would soon become unpopular ; that

those who made it would, of course, share in that unpopularity ; that the war-spirit would revive, and affection for the war-minister would revive with it ; and his object was to retire from the government until some weaker man should achieve the peace and the unpopularity, and thus, with unsuspecting hands, smooth the path for his return to power. Accordingly, his conscience suddenly smote him ; the wrongs of the Catholics haunted him ; he could no longer tolerate intolerance ; he must forego the sweets of power, rather than participate in its abuse. The poor king was suddenly startled and affrighted with a statement of these intensified scruples. He had pet scruples of his own, as the minister well knew. Resignation followed ; “ Doctor ” Addington, the amiable and innocent sharer of the royal scruples, stood ready to relieve his master and manage the nation ; — he believed in Pitt’s promises of help, was cheated by him, made the peace of Amiens, was hissed and lampooned out of office by Pitt’s friends, and the great man returned to his ministry, and troubled himself no more about the Catholics to his dying day.

This *hot-chestnut* operation, we learn, as we have said, from recent memoirs ; and this, with other similar lights thrown upon men’s characters and the springs of their actions, reconciles us to this species of literature, and rebukes us for the half-complaining tone in which we have spoken of it.

But it is quite time to say something of the book before us. Sir John Barrow’s name has been so long and so familiarly associated with the English Admiralty, he had, for so many years, filled a station which seemed to afford him peculiar opportunities for collecting valuable anecdotes concerning great men and great events, that the title of the book is one of much promise, and we opened it with very confident expectations of much amusement, and some proper hopes of much instruction. But, to save our character for honesty, we are fain to confess our disappointment. We find one quarter of the book filled with notes upon Lord Macartney’s embassy to China ; another quarter taken up with some account of Southern Africa ; and we have the peculiar satisfaction of discovering, that thus far, we have nothing except what was deemed unworthy of publication in the author’s former elaborate volumes upon these subjects. We are next entertained with some reflections on the Kaffir war, in 1846, with which Sir John had nothing more to do than had President Polk. We then

begin upon the Admiralty, and it is hard to conceive of a greater dearth of valuable information, or instructive or amusing anecdote, or even of naughty gossip, than we are here called upon to encounter. It is the story of a mere drudge in office, — arranging old papers, preserving ancient records, and now and then amusing himself by seeing ships, as he says, “undergo the operation of launching.”

The autobiographer begins, according to approved usage, with an account of his birth, parentage, and education. He says that he was the only son of Roger and Mary Barrow, and that “in the extreme northern part of North Lancashire is the market-town of Ulverstone, and not far from it the obscure village of Dragleybeck, in which a small cottage gave him birth,” — thereby, doubtless, saving the said Mary much trouble. The first forty years of his life were spent in “rambling, angling, sea-voyages, and pedestrian exercises in foreign countries”; and the next forty mostly “in such sedentary exercise of the mind as is required of a Secretary of the Admiralty.” But during this latter period, he has produced “six quarto volumes, four octavos, three or four smaller books, about a dozen articles in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and close upon two hundred articles in the *Quarterly Review*.” “And these,” he says, “are the kind of mental exercises that have tended to keep up a flow of health and of animal spirits.” Heaven bless him!

After this general account of the book, many extracts from it will not be expected. It is written in a rambling, slipshod style, and at a time when “health and animal spirits” had apparently outlasted the power of much “sedentary exercise of the mind.” It abounds in mistakes in regard to matters about which one would have supposed the author to be particularly well informed. He speaks, for instance, of the “Right Hon. *Hiley* Addington having become Prime Minister” (page 235); thus cheating the Doctor out of his Christian name, which we have always understood to be Henry. He says (page 338), that “the Duke of Wellington was appointed to take the situation of Premier, become vacant by the resignation of Mr. Canning.” Mr. Canning did not resign, but died in office; and the Duke did not become Premier until after the intervention of another administration. After these and similar blunders, our good friends of Nantucket will not be scandalized to learn that Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin

went to visit his relations and establish a school at "an island in the St. Lawrence."

We have several specimens of what may be called the *bounding style* of writing, — as, for instance : —

"With the above exception, the blessings of peace and prosperity were abundantly shed on the British empire. From the year 1816 to 1818, almost the whole progeny of the royal family and its branches were marrying and given in marriage, and among them his Royal Highness, the Duke of Clarence, was united to her Serene Highness Amelia Adelaide, daughter of the late Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. The Dukes of Kent, Cumberland, and Cambridge each took to himself a German princess. Death, however, was not sparing of its victims. In 1820, George III. died, in the eighty-second year of his age, having lost his queen, Charlotte, two years before. His successor, George IV., in the second year of his reign, visited Ireland, and in 1822 embarked at Greenwich for Scotland, and died in the year 1830, when King William IV. was proclaimed." — pp. 332, 333.

At page 271 we have another specimen of compressed narrative, rapid association, and tender pathos.

"The prosecution [of Melville] hastened, as generally believed, the death of Mr. Pitt, which happened on the 23d of January, 1806, in his forty-seventh year, being of the same age as the immortal Nelson, whose career was cut short on the 5th of October, in the preceding year, and whose remains were deposited in St. Paul's Church the 9th of January, 1806, just fourteen days before Mr. Pitt's death. Another great character, Charles James Fox, expired on the 13th of September, 1806, in the fifty-eighth year of his age. He should have died some fifteen months sooner."

Why poor Fox should have died before his time, or who is in fault for the gross neglect implied in his living so long, is not stated.

Sir John is shocked that Mr. Whitbread should have dared to attack Lord Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty, &c., and flouts at his origin thus : — "Mr. Whitbread, a wealthy plebeian brewer, who had aspired to become a Senator" (page 265) ; and quotes some lines of Mr. Canning, (the son of the actress) noting the same baseness of birth. If Thurlow and Eldon had joined in the sneer, the picture would have been complete.

All the author's Admiralty sensibilities are alive upon the

subject of the American naval victories in the war of 1812. He evidently thinks there was some unfairness about this matter on our part, that a *Yankee trick* was played off upon his countrymen, and is clearly of opinion that if our ships had been much smaller, and our men much fewer, the results would have been different. He thinks the hitherto unsuspecting innocence and ignorance of Great Britain will not again be lulled into a false sense of security upon this subject.

We have an account of a king's after-dinner speech; which, for its novelty, is worth noting. On one occasion, "a few naval officers and civilians," and among them Sir John, were commanded to attend divine service, and dine at the palace with the king (William).

"The queen, with a few ladies, joined the dinner party, and when the queen was about to retire, the king desired that the ladies would stay, as he had something to say on this occasion, that would bring to the recollection of the naval officers then present the battles that their predecessors and brother-officers had fought and won, — battles worthy of record, as proving that the naval history of this country had not been neglected or forgotten by succeeding generations.

"All being attentive, his Majesty began with noticing the first invasion of Britain by Julius Cæsar, [save the mark !] — which he said must have proved to the natives the necessity of a naval force to prevent and repel foreign invasion. From that period he passed on rapidly to the landing of the Danes and Northern nations on our coasts, till he came down to more recent times, when the navy of Great Britain had become *great* and victorious, from the days of Elizabeth to William III., and thence to our own times ; and it was remarked by the officers present how correctly he gave the details of the great actions fought in the course of the last and present centuries. I believe, however, that the queen and the ladies were not displeased to be released."

How sensible women are !

There is something striking in the accounts we find, in all books of this description, of the alienation existing among the various members of the Royal family under the Guelph dynasty. It seems to have become a part of the English constitution, that the heir-apparent should be at war with him who, for the time being, enjoys the "grace of God," — and family quarrels appear to be much more frequent with them than among mortals of lower degree. We have an amusing

instance of paternal kindness and kingly condescension mentioned at page 341. The Duke of Clarence (afterwards William IV.) was Lord High Admiral of England in 1827, and being about to make an official "visitation" of the dock-yards in the Royal Sovereign yacht, asked the king — that loving brother, faithful husband, and "first gentleman in Europe" — to lend him plate ; "which he refused."

The most remarkable thing about this book is, that it almost entirely overlooks the true claim which Barrow has to be remembered and respected. There is no doubt that he was a man of considerable scientific attainment, (so much so, that, upon that ground, he was made a Doctor of Laws and created a Baronet,) and that he perseveringly and effectually brought it to bear upon those Arctic voyages which have yielded so much honor to those who projected and encouraged, as well as to those who accomplished them. Barrow's long connection with the Admiralty gave him, necessarily, great influence there ; his love of adventure turned a facile ear to all new projects of discovery ; his love of science gave his views and suggestions great value ; and a large share of the honor flowing from the discoveries made undoubtedly belongs to him.

In a letter written to him by Mr. Murdock, it is said : —

"During forty years, that you were a Secretary of the Admiralty, you were the constant and the successful advocate of those voyages of discovery which have enlarged the bounds of science, and done so much honor to the British navy and nation. The enduring fortitude and untiring enterprise with which Parry and Ross, and Franklin and Back, braved the rigors of a polar winter and the perils of a frozen sea, will render their names for ever famous in the annals of navigation, and the name of Barrow will be associated with them by posterity."

We do not doubt the truth of this, and cannot but think that Sir John might have given us a much more interesting volume, if he had not missed the true point of interest in his life. As it is, in the discharge of our duty, we call upon our readers to respect him and avoid his book. It is a poor account of a good man, an ill-written story of a practised writer, and a valueless and uninteresting "Life" of one whose life has been both valuable and instructive.